

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

When the nine 'Gentlemen interested in the pursuit of Natural Science' met in Glasgow in 1851 to form the Natural History Society of Glasgow (NHSG), the new science of photographic imaging was only about ten years old. The photographic processes in use were expensive, time-consuming and highly skilled - even hazardous. Photographers had to prepare their own light sensitive emulsions in a darkroom, coat the emulsion onto paper, metal or glass, and expose the material wet in the camera. These plates had then to be processed immediately after exposure. The procedures were feasible in the convenience of a photographic portrait studio but photography in the field involved travelling about with a portable darkroom built into a horse-drawn wagon. Some early photographers were so dedicated to their art that they managed to undertake excellent photography during the 1850s while abroad in the heat and sands of Egypt, in India, in the Far East and even in the aftermath of battles during the Crimean War.

In the 1880s the advent of prepackaged, commercially available, dry glass-plates released photographers from the restriction of having to be near a darkroom facility. The exposed dry plates could be stored and processed later at a more convenient time. Wildlife photography in the field now became more practicable. Pictures could be taken by waiting in a hide with everything set up ready for a good opportunity to arise. During the following decades the clicking of Society members' cameras could be heard in many remote corners of Scotland. The wildlife photography of these pioneering NHSG members became well-known throughout Scotland and even nationally. In 1869 the NHSG published volume one of *The Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Glasgow* covering the period from 1859-1869 in which full details of meetings, lectures, exhibits and membership lists were given. The following information has been extracted from the *Proceedings* and subsequent titles.

EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY

There is no mention of photographs in the accounts until the 18th October 1869. The *Proceedings* record that Mr Gray "also submitted to the inspection of the meeting a photograph of Urns and Bones, lately taken from several graves of

ancient Britons discovered in Cumbrae, and read a short notice of them, sent by Mr John Levack, a corresponding member."

The next reference to photographs was in 21st February 1871 when "Mr John Young, F.G.S., exhibited photographs of ripple-marked sandstone, and unusually large stems of *Lepidodrendon* and *Sigillaria*, which had been taken from the adjoining quarries during the progress of building of the new University." It is not recorded who took the pictures therefore it is unlikely that it was a member of the NHSG.

On the 31st March 1874 it is noted that a Glasgow photographer was commissioned to produce the following pictures. "A number of large and beautiful photographs of slabs of polyzoa, crinoidea, and shells, executed by Mr Thomas Annan, Sauchiehall Street were exhibited by the President (Professor John Young, M.D., F.G.S.) as illustrative of what could be done by photography in producing faithful pictures of the numerous and varied organisms that crowd many of our limestone shales." Thereafter photographs were displayed regularly.

On the 29th November 1886 "Mr. James J. F. X. King, on behalf of the donors, presented to the Society a framed photograph of the party present at the excursion to Cadzow Forest [Hamilton High Parks] on the 25th September. The print, which was a fine example of photographic art, had been produced on a much enlarged scale by Mr William Goodwin; and an elegant frame provided by Mr W. Craibe Angus, added considerably to the attractiveness of its appearance." Mr William Goodwin, elected a member in 1881, was probably the Society's first member who practiced photography. In 1883 he was noted as having given a demonstration of photography using a microscope.

As the years passed more and more Society members emerged from darkrooms across Glasgow producing exciting images of natural history subjects. The Council at a meeting on the 28th October 1890 issued the following notice "regarding the more efficient working of the various departments of the Society's business" suggesting that the Society should "provide *inter*

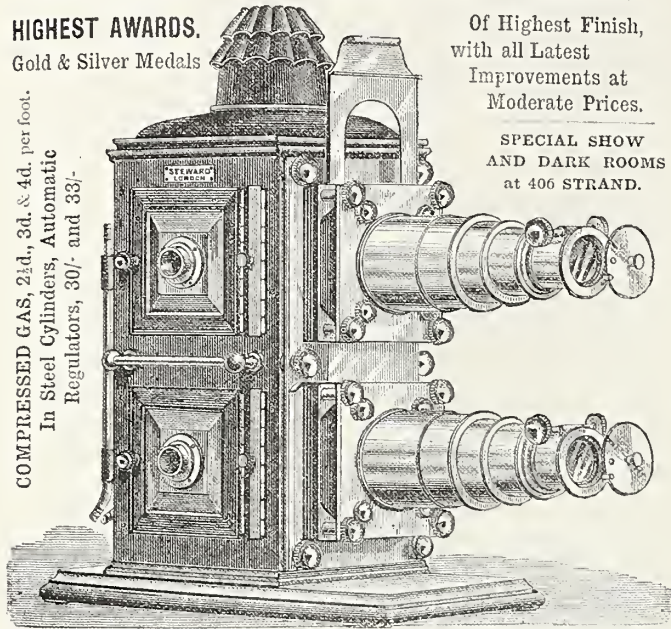
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Moderate Prices.

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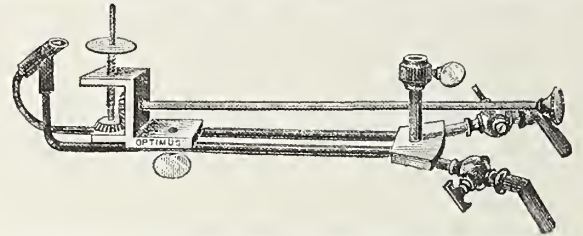
COMPRESSED GAS, 2½d., 3d. & 4d. per foot.
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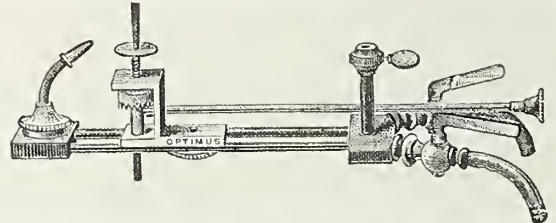
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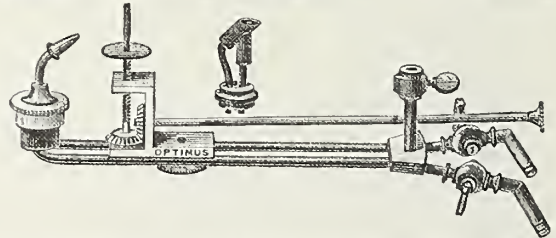
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MAGIC LANTERN GAS JETS FOR LIMELIGHT.



Best quality blow-through gas jet, with cog-wheel arrangement for turning,
also raising and lowering the lime; platina nipple each 11/-



Best mixed chamber gas jet, with cog-wheel arrangement for turning, also
raising and lowering the lime; platina nipple each 16/6



New interchangeable jet or both gases under pressure, mixed or for blow-
through form, by simply removing and using the burner as required;
both have platina nipples each 18/6

Fig. 1 An advert for a Magic Lantern and ancillary apparatus taken from the *British Journal of Photography Almanac*

alia for the appointment annually in November of the following Committees to undertake certain specified duties: (1) Museum Committee, (2) Research Committee, (3) Summer Committee, (4) Publishing Committee, (5) Library Committee, (6) **Photographical Committee,** and (7) Microscopical Committee.” This is the first mention of a Photographic Section. Unfortunately, the list of office-bearers for that and subsequent years, does not formally include the Convenors of Sections who were *ex officio* members of the Council.

THE MAGIC LANTERN

In the 1880s mention is made of Lantern Slide shows. The first recorded was a presentation given by Mr Thomas King. He “made some remarks on the use of the Magic Lantern (Fig. 1) for the purposes of teaching” and “in illustration of his remarks, Mr King exhibited a series of lantern-slides representing groups of the *Diatomaceae*, sections of tissues, etc., and, in every case the minute details of the objects were brought out with a very clear definition.”

In the 1890s lectures were often described as being illustrated by ‘Lime-light Views’. This description resulted from the method used to produce a bright light in the Lantern or projector in today’s terminology. Before the advent of

convenient supplies of high voltage electricity, the most popular way to illuminate a projector was to burn a piece of lime to white-heat by using gasburners. A supply of compressed gas was available in cylinders from the manufacturers of the equipment. Such projectors must have been rather noisy, certainly rather smelly and obviously highly dangerous!

As the popularity and frequency of Lantern Shows increased, the Council called in 1900 for voluntary contributions towards the purchase of “a Lime Light Lantern and it was intimated that the fund had reached £22.” An Honorary Lanternist was appointed later. As far as is known, he survived the experience!

The Magic Lantern itself projected a 3_ square inch slide onto a white wall or cloth. Some Lanterns had two or even three lenses and this allowed dissolves between the pictures including superimpositions. The effects produced by these arrangements were often dramatic and spectacular - hence the popular name of Magic Lantern. Lantern slides were mainly black and white but many artistic workers chemically toned their slides for effect (Fig. 2). Others hand-tinted the black and white slides in natural colours using dyes. Some remarkably beautiful slides were produced.

Fig. 2 Lantern Slides used by members of the Society between c1900 to the 1950s.

Gannet with young on Ailsa Craig



Standard black & white slide - Charles Kirk

Sunset at the north end of Ailsa Craig



Black & white slide chemically toned - Charles Kirk

Ailsa Craig viewed from the south



Black & white slide chemically toned - Charles Kirk

PULLI.E ORCHIDS. S. 7



Hand tinted black & white slide - Bob MacKechnie

CF2. Rose-hay Willow Herb - Meamskirk



Dufaycolour colour-screen plate - Dr S. Henderson

Calocera viscosa. Fr.



ROTHESAY. Sept: 1913. W. R. Baxter,

Autochrome colour-screen plate - William Baxter

The ever popular Lantern Shows continued to delight the membership over many decades. The advent of 2x2 inch transparencies exposed on 35mm colour slide film became increasingly popular. Many people moved over to the economical and convenient new format. Older members continued to refer to projected images as lantern slides, regardless of the format, and they often wrote the minutes of the meetings! It is therefore difficult to state exactly when the last 3 inch slides were projected.

EARLY PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THE SOCIETY

From the 1890s onwards, many members of the Society were able to prepare Lantern Slides from their photographs taken in the field and the membership was regularly treated to, or probably embarrassed by, photographs of themselves caught on summer excursions. By the beginning of the twentieth century members were now being treated annually to exhibitions of Lantern Slides which were shown "under the auspices of the Photographical Committee." - the forerunner of today's Members' Slide Night. The following account of 1906 includes a list of many of the active photographers in the Society at that time. "The meeting was devoted to the exhibition of lantern slides illustrative of various branches of natural history, topography, etc. Ornithological subjects were dealt with by Messrs. William R. Baxter, Charles Kirk, T. Thornton MacKeith, James W. Reoch, John Robertson, and Hugh Wilson, each of whom showed a fine series of slides representing many species of native Birds, with their nests, eggs, and young, and depicting some of the most attractive phases of bird-life. Botany was illustrated by Messrs. George Herriot, Robert McLean, J. Fleming, William Goodwin, and David R. Somerville, whose slides included views of wild plants in their native habitats, as well as numerous artistic floral studies etc. A series submitted by Mr Robert Garry, B.Sc., contained some fine micro-photographs of Fresh-water Algae. Scottish Geology, as illustrated by highland mountains and glens formed the subject of a beautiful set of slides shown by Mr Reoch; while various other interesting topographical views were submitted by Messrs. Herriot, Somerville, and Wilson."

Most natural history photographers at the beginning of the twentieth century experimented with many of the new positive colour-screen glass plates which were beginning to appear on the market. Most of these processes were impracticable, expensive and produced very unsatisfactory results. They differed from today's colour-slide films in that a positive silver image remained after processing which resulted in a grainy, very dark image which required an especially bright light-source in the lantern. The present day slide-films contain no silver image and consist of a dye image only. Lumière Autochrome

plates were the first commercially successful additive colour system and manufacture and distribution began as early as 1906. The first member to use and project colour Lantern Slides to the Society taken on Autochrome was Charles Kirk. He was an eminent Glasgow taxidermist and natural history photographer and on the 28th January 1908 it is recorded that "On behalf of Mr Charles Kirk, Mr John Paterson showed a colour-photograph lantern-slide of eggs of the Razorbill and the Common Guillemot. The variation in the colour and markings were brought out very distinctly. It was stated that this was probably the first occasion on which a slide of birds' eggs photographed by the new Lumière process had been shown in Glasgow."

Very soon after that date many Society members began to show their own home processed Autochromes at the annual lantern slide shows. Notable among these was William Baxter, a past president and former convenor of the Photographic Section, who specialised in photographing plants and fungi mainly on the Isle of Bute. Other exponents of this beautiful colour process were George Herriot, J. R. Jack, John Thomson, Robert McLean and William Pettigrew.

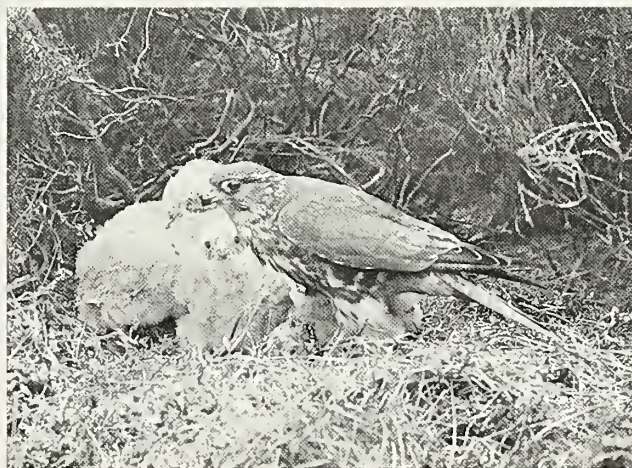
NOTABLE WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THE SOCIETY

Charles Kirk (1871-1922) was elected a member of the then Natural History Society of Glasgow on the 24th November 1896.

Charles Kirk (Fig. 3) was born and schooled in Edinburgh and later trained as a taxidermist in London. His first employment as a taxidermist was in 1894 with P. D. Malloch in Perth. While living in Perth he became interested in natural history photography. After moving to Glasgow to set up his own business in 1896, he travelled around photographing birds. His favourite haunt was Ailsa Craig where many of his pictures of seabirds were taken, in particular, his gannet photographs. He became famous for his action pictures of sea birds in flight. Considering the limited camera technology of his time, these pictures were a considerable accomplishment. In 1904, Gowans and Gray began publishing a series of pocket picture books on natural history. Each volume was illustrated throughout with sixty high quality plates. Charles Kirk illustrated three such volumes entitled *Wild Birds at Home*, series 1, 2 and 3. The books were so popular with the public that most were reprinted a number of times followed by second editions. His taxidermy was also highly skilled and innovative. Some of his bird and animal cabinets are still on display in local museums and at the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Charles Kirk did not hold office in the NHGS but he regularly exhibited mounted specimens of any rare birds sent to him by clients. His Lantern

Fig. 3 A selection of wildlife photographs by Charles Kirk (1871-1922).



Charles Kirk



Top left: Charles Kirk using a half-plate stereo camera on Ailsa Craig. **Top right:** Gannet about to land on its nest, Ailsa Craig (undated). **Middle right:** Merlin at nest with young (published 1906). **Bottom:** Wild Goats on Ailsa Craig (undated).

Fig. 4 Bird photographs by Charles Palmer (1919-1986).



C. E. Palmer

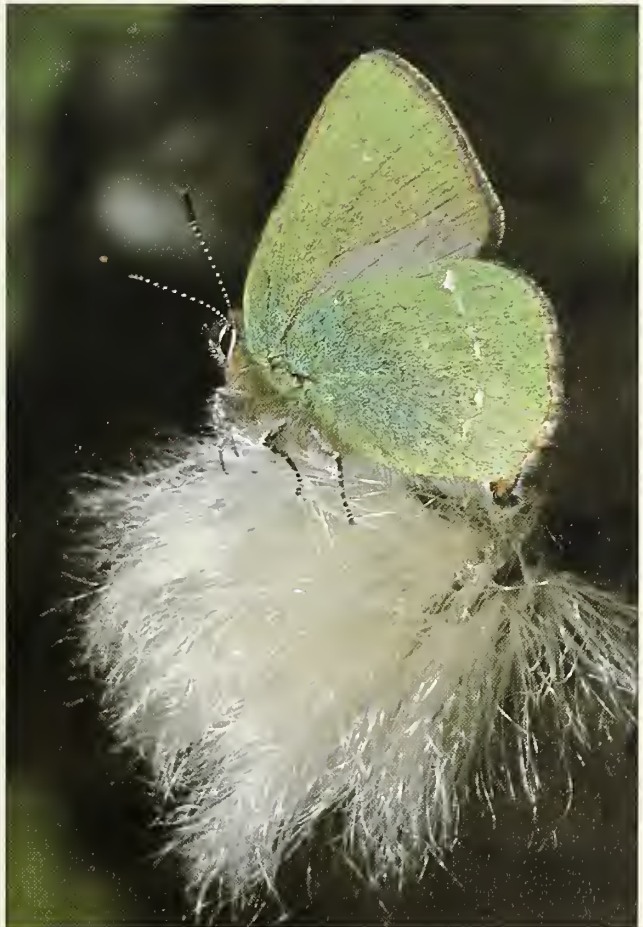


Top left: Charlie Palmer birdwatching in Glasgow. **Top right:** Black-throated Diver on its nest, Loch Maree, 1952. **Bottom:** Golden Eagle adorning its nest with a rowan twig, Argyll, 1952.

Fig. 5 A selection of orchid and butterfly photographs by Gerald Rodway (1926-1985).



Gerald Rodway.



Top left: Gerry Rodway with a Nikon 35mm camera outfit. **Top right:** Bee Orchid photographed in south England. **Bottom left:** Common Blue butterflies roosting at night. **Bottom right:** Green Hairstreak at rest on a Bog Cotton seedhead.

Shows, such as *Bird Life of Ailsa Craig* and *Some Wild Birds at Home*, were extremely popular with the membership. The reports of such meetings include "The slides were exceedingly beautiful and reflect great credit on Mr. Kirk" and "How and from where the photographs were taken is yet the wonder of many who were present."

Charles E. Palmar (1919-1986) was elected a member of the then Andersonian Naturalists of Glasgow on the 14th June 1948.

The son of a horticulturist, Charles Palmar (Fig. 4) was born at Leamington Spa in Warwickshire but spent most of his childhood in the Sussex countryside. It was there his lifelong passion for natural history developed. He took up photography at the age of twelve using a simple box camera. Charlie, as he was known to many members of the Society, later used plate cameras for his nest photography of birds, such as the Bittern, as he travelled around the south of England.

The war years brought him to Oban while serving in the RAF. After the war Charlie settled in Glasgow where he took up employment as a medical photographer in Yorkhill Hospital. In 1949 he became Curator of Natural History at Kelvingrove Museum. Throughout his years in Scotland, Charlie devoted himself to bird photography, particularly the Golden Eagle, which became his favourite subject. He made many 16mm cine films about Scottish birds some of which gained national awards. His excellent photographs, both colour and black and white, were published in many Scottish magazines and national bird journals. His wildlife photography was on a par with the work of such great bird photographers as John Markam and Eric Hosking.

Charlie Palmar was elected Photographic Convenor in 1951. He served the Society both as a member of the council on numerous occasions and as Vice-President from 1979-1981. Older members of the Society will remember, with great enthusiasm, evenings spent watching his films and marvelling at the beauty of his intimate portraits of Eagles, Buzzards and other Scottish birds at their nests. He gave many lectures to the Society, his first in April 1948, and the last, and possibly his most memorable lecture, was *Fifty Years of Natural History* which was delivered on the 13th November 1984 shortly before he retired.

F. Gerald Rodway (1926-1985) was elected a member of the then Andersonian Naturalists of Glasgow on the 24th April 1960.

Gerald Rodway (Fig. 5) or Gerry as he was always known to the membership, was brought up in the Gwent and Cotswold countryside. It was there that his life-long interest in natural history developed. Plants were his initial enthusiasm, in particular, orchids and bryophytes. For almost 30

years, Gerry was the Orchid specialist at Glasgow Botanic Gardens where, with great enthusiasm, he built up a very fine collection. His knowledge and expertise was greatly sought after both locally and nationally and he was much in demand as a lecturer - especially by the Society. In later years he developed a passion for butterflies and moths. He travelled the length and breadth of Britain seeking out various species of butterflies which he photographed to a very high standard. Gerry was a strong advocate for conservation - a subject which interested him greatly. He was the prime motivator in the formation of the Glasgow and south-west Scotland Branch of the British Butterfly Conservation Society.

Gerry Rodway was elected as Convenor of the Photographic Section in 1972 - a post which he held until 1982. During this time he presented the Society with many excellent slide shows at the Members' Slide Night. His enthusiasm and advice was an inspiration to many Society members embarking on plant or butterfly photography. He regularly wrote short notes on his observations and records for the *Glasgow Naturalist*. Many of his orchid photographs were displayed in the Botanic Gardens and published in relevant journals.

THE FUTURE

The advent of sophisticated automatic 35mm cameras in recent years has allowed most Society members to indulge in natural history photography. The results of their endeavours are regularly shown at the Members' Slide Night which, since its inception in the 1890s, has continued to be a popular event on the syllabus. Now that the current digital revolution is gaining new converts in imaging, it is possible that future Members' Slide Nights will be presented using yet another new "Lantern" - namely a multi-media projector which will display digital images from a compact disk onto a screen. Whatever imaging technology the future may bring, GNHS members will continue to be at the cutting edge.